Tells the Facts and Names the Names

\$2.50

CounterPunch

February 16-29, 2004 *Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair* VOL. 11, NO. 4

Our Little Secrets

Kerry in Vietnam

By Alexander Cockburn & Jeffrey St Clair

In his senior year at Yale in 1966 John Kerry enlisted in the US Navy, with his actual induction scheduled for the summer, after his graduation. Already notorious among his contemporaries for his political ambition, he'd maneuvered himself into the top slot at the Yale political union, while also winning admission to Skull and Bones.

While Bush, two years behind Kerry, was seeking commercial opportunity at Yale by selling ounce bags of cocaine (see CounterPunch, October 2000), Kerry was keeping a vigilant eye on the political temperature and duly noted a contradiction between his personal commitment to go to war and the growing antiwar sentiment among the masses, some of whom he hoped would vote for him at a not too distant time.

It was a season for important decisions and Kerry pondered his options amid the delights of a Skull and Bones retreat on an island in the St Lawrence river. He duly decided to junk his speech on the theme of "life after graduation" and opted for a fiery denunciation of the war and of an LBJ. It was a decent speech, well received by the students and some professors. Most parents were aghast, though not Kerry's own mother and father.

Unlike Bill Clinton and George Bush, Kerry duly presented himself for military service. After a year's training he was assigned to the USS

(**OLS** *continued on page 2*)

A Coup for the Entente Cordiale! Why France Joined the US in Haiti

By HEATHER WILLIAMS

Setting aside for the moment their splutterings of U.S. military aggression in Iraq, and their deeper rage at America's dominance, the French have clearly decided that some imperial jobs still are worth joint action. Beginning Monday, March 1, a contingent of French gendarmes, along with a handful of Canadian Special Forces and several hundred U.S. Marines disembarked in Port Au Prince and began their U.N.-sanctioned "humanitarian" mission to Haiti after President Aristide's ouster from power. Taking up their positions in leisurely style, amid a certain vagueness on what the proclaimed purpose of military personnel in Haiti would be this time, the troops on the ground took diligent steps to secure embassies and the airport while stepping over bodies. Guns blazed in the streets for two days, leaving no less than 150 dead while Col. David Berger, the Marine Corps commander in charge, explained to the New York Times that policing was not part of his mandate. "I have no instructions to disarm the rebels", he said. Apparently emboldened by the occupying troops, rebel commander Guy Philippe event briefly declared himself head of the armed forces on Tuesday before being sternly told to be quiet and to tell his men to stop brandishing their arms while the cameras of foreign correspondents were on them.

So begins Haiti's third century as a sovereign nation. Broke, impoverished, and now saddled again with a phalanx of armed assassins who have returned to Haiti after committing unspeakable crimes under the dictatorships of Raoul Cedras (1991-94) and father and son Duvalier (1957-1986), Haitians have scant reason to celebrate their putative independence, originally wrested from the French in 1804.

There is no question that outside powers orchestrated the latest regime crisis and subsequent removal from power of President Aristide. The question is why. Why indeed are the U.S. and French collaborating in this ill-begotten venture? After all, in the world of *realpolitik* , Haiti is best left to regulate its own affairs. Intervention is costly, unseemly, disorganized and under-funded. It brings up nasty charges of racism for the relevant Great Powers, one of which touts of its humanitarian commitment to its former *coloniales*, and the other of which is in an election year. In return there is also so little to take from Haiti these days. Its mines are gutted, its soils eroded, its shores overfished, its people malnourished. It provides neither a significant export market nor any vital inputs for wealthy trade partners. Despite some enterprise zones with ultra-cheap labor probably eclipsed by more productive installations in next-door Dominican Republic and a small tourist trade, Haiti really has very little to offer outside powers. And finally, the duress of a country that has been blockaded from virtually all lines of international credit and trade for three years is a liability, particularly for the United States. Despite a docile media that keeps the issue on the back burner, the specter of Haitians fleeing the island being kept in armed camps in the U.S., or turned back at sea without hearings still embarrasses the mid-level officials who must occasionally explain why the United States so selectively honors its treaty obligations to harbor refugees and conduct thorough asylum hearings. The French similarly have made little attempt to accommodate Haitian refugees in their *departements* in

(**Haiti** *continued on page 3)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(**OLS** *continued from page 1)*

Gridley, deployed to the Pacific, probably carrying nuclear missiles. Beset by boredom Kerry received the news that once of his best friends, Dickie Pershing, grandson of "Black Jack" Pershing had been killed in Vietnam. Kerry seethed with rage and yearned, as he put it years later to his biographer Douglas Brinkley, for vengeance. (Brinkley's recently published and highly admiring bio, A Tour of Duty: John Kerry and the Vietnam War, offers many telling vignettes to an assiduous reader. It's based almost entirely on Kerry's comprehensive diaries and letters of the time.)

Kerry engineered reassignment to the Swift boat patrol.In Vietnam the Tet offensive had prompted a terrible series of search and destroy missions by the US, plus the assassination program known as Phoenix. As part of the US Navy's slice of the action, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt and his sidekick Captain Roy "Latch" Hoffman had devised "Operation Sealords", in which the Swift boats would patrol the canals and secondary streams of the Mekong Delta, with particular emphasis on the areas near the Cambodian border.

The basic plan, explicitly acknowledged by many Swift boat veterans, was to terrorize the peasants into turning against the National Liberation Front, aka Viet Cong. The entire area, except for certain designated "friendly villages", was a free fire zone, meaning the Americans could shoot at will and count anyone they killed as VC.

Arriving in Vietnam on November 17, 1968, Kerry chafed at patrols around Cam Ranh bay and pushed successfully for assignment to the forward killing patrols. This was no Al Gore, content to smoke pot and shoot hoops on his Army base in Vietnam, while sending home fierce moral critiques of the war. "I was more opposed to the war than ever", Kerry told Brinkley in 2003, "yet more compelled by patriotism to fight it. I guess until you're in it, you still want to try it."

Day after day, night after night, the Swift boats plied the waters, harassing and often killing villagers, fishermen and farmers. In this program of intentional harassment, aimed at intimidating the peasants into submission, Kerry was famously zealous. One of his fellow lieutenants, James R. Wasser, described him admiringly in these words: "Kerry was an extremely aggressive officer and so was I. I liked that he took the fight to the enemy, that he was tough and gutsy – not afraid to spill blood for his country."

On December 2, Kerry went on his first patrol up one of the canals. It was near midnight when the crew caught sight of a sampan. Rules of engagement required no challenge, no effort to see who was on board the sampan. Kerry sent up a flare, signal for his crew to start blazing away with the boat's two machineguns and M16 rifles. Kerry described the fishermen "running away like gazelles".

Kerry sustained a very minor wound to his arm, probably caused by debris from his own boat's salvoes. The scratch earned him his first Purple Heart, a medal awarded for those wounded in combat.

Actually there's no evidence that anyone had fired back, or that Kerry had been in combat, as becomes obvious when we read an entry from his diary about a subsequent excursion, written on December 11, 1968, nine days after the incident that got Kerry his medal. "A cocky air of invincibility accompanied us up the Long Tau shipping channel, because we hadn't been shot at yet, and Americans at war who haven't been shot at are allowed to be cocky."

He got two more Purple Hearts, both for relatively minor wounds. Indeed Kerry never missed a day of duty for any of the medal-earning wounds.

Craving more action, Kerry got himself deployed to An Thoi, at Vietnam's southern tip, one of the centers for the lethal Phoenix sweeps and the location of a infamous interrogation camp which held as many as 30,000 prisoners.

Kerry's first mission as part of the Phoenix program was to ferry a Provincial Reconnaissance Unit of South Vietnamese soldiers, which would have been led by either a Green Beret or CIA officer. After off-loading the unit Kerry hid his Swift boat in a mangrove backwater. Two hours later a red flare told them that the PRU wanted an emergency "extraction".

Kerry's boat picked up the PRU team, plus two prisoners. The leader of the PRU team told Kerry that while they were kidnapping the two villagers (one of them a young woman) from their hut, they'd seen four people in a sampan and promptly killed them. The two prisoners were "body-snatched" as part of a regular schedule of such seizures in the victims would be taken to An Thoi for interrogation and torture.

Kerry's term to Brinkley for such outings – and there were many in his brief – is "accidental atrocities".

On daylight missions the Swift boats were accompanied by Cobra Attack helicopters that would strafe the river banks and the skeletal forest ravaged by napalm and Agent Orange. "Helos upset the VC [sic, meaning anyone on the ground] more than anything else that we had to offer", Kerry tells Brinkley, "and any chance we had to have them with us was more than welcome."

An example of these Cobras in action. It's daylight, so the population is not under curfew. Kerry's boat is working its way up a canal, with a Cobra above it. They encounter a sampan with several people in it. The helicopter hovers right above the sampan, then empties its machineguns into it, killing everyone and sinking the sampan. Kerry, in his war diary, doesn't lament the deaths but does deplore the senselessness of the Cobra's crew in using all of its ammunition, since the chopper pilot "requested permission to leave in order to rearm, an operation that left us uncovered for more than 45 minutes in an area where cover was essential".

Christmas Eve, 1968, finds Kerry leading a patrol up a canal along the Cambodian border. The Christmas ceasefire has just come into effect. So what the boat was doing there is a question in and of itself.

Editors
Alexander Cockburn
Jeffrey St. Clair

Business
Becky Grant

Design
Deborah Thomas

Counselor
Ben Sonnenberg

Published twice monthly except August, 22 issues a year:
$40 individuals,
$100 institutions/supporters
$30 student/low-income
CounterPunch.
All rights reserved.
CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558
1-800-840-3683 (phone)
counterpunch@counterpunch.org
www.counterpunch.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They spot two sampans and chase them to a small fishing village. The boat takes some sniper fire, (or at least Kerry says it did). Kerry orders his machine-gunner, James Wasser, to open up a barrage.

At last a note of contrition, but not from Kerry. Wasser describes to Brinkley how he saw that he'd killed an old man leading a water buffalo. "I'm haunted by that old man's face. He was just doing his daily farming, hurting nobody. He got hit in the chest with an M-60 machinegun round. It may have been Christmas Eve, but I was real somber after that to see the old man blown away sticks with you." It turned out that Kerry's boat had shot up one of the few "friendly" villages, with a garrison of South Vietnamese ARV soldiers, two of whom were wounded.

Contrast Wasser's sad reflections with Kerry's self-righteous account in his diary of such salvoes, often aimed into Cambodian territory. "On occasion we had shot towards the border when provoked by sniper or ambush, but without fail this led to a formal reprimand by the Cambodian government and accusations of civilian slaughters and random killings by American 'aggressors'. I have no doubt that on occasion some innocents were hit by bullets that were aimed in self-defense at the enemy, but of all the cases in Vietnam that could be labeled massacres, this was certainly the most spurious."

It's very striking how we never find, in any of Kerry's diaries or letters, the slightest expression of contrition or remorse – and Brinkley would surely have cited them had Kerry ever written such words. Nor did Kerry, in his later career as a self-promoting star of the antiwar movement, ever go beyond generalized verbiage about accidents of war, even as many vets were baring their souls about the horrors they had perpetrated.

It's not that he couldn't have summoned up for his audiences back then some awful episodes. For example, a few weeks after the incident on the Cambodian border Kerry's boat was heading up the Cua Lon river toward Square bay, when one of the crew yelled "sampan off port bow". Kerry ordered the machineguns to fire on the fishing boat.

The sampan stopped and Kerry and his crew boarded it. They found a woman holding an infant, and near her the body of her young child riddled with machine gun bullets, lying face down among bags of rice.

Kerry tells Brinkley he refused to look at the dead child, saying, "the face would stay with me for the rest of my life and it was better not to know whether it was a smile or grimace or whether it was a girl or boy". Kerry's preferred mode is the usual one. "Our orders", he tells Brinkley a few pages later, "were to destroy all the hooches and sampans we could find."

As part of Operation Sea Lords Kerry would ferry Nung tribesmen on assassination missions. The Nung were paid by the kill, and Kerry contrasts them favorably to the South Vietnamese PF guardsmen, derisively terming the latter "Cream Puffs". On one occasion, Kerry tells Brinkley, he ferried Nung to a village where they seized an old man and forced him to act as a human mine detector, walking ahead of them along the trail. There were no mines and the Nung encountered no enemy. But for the old man it was a one way trip. The Nung slit his throat, disembowelled him and left a warning note on his body.

When Kerry was awarded his Silver Star (a episode we'll be looking at in the next issue of CounterPunch) he had it pinned on by Admiral Elmo Zumwalt and at the ceremony had the opportunity to meet Commander Adrian Lonsdale, the operational commander of Sealords.

Kerry seized the chance to criticize the conduct of the war: "It's not that the men are afraid or chicken to go into the rivers", he says he told Lonsdale. "It's not that they're not willing to risk their lives, or that they don't agree with the principle of what's being done over here. It's just that they want to have a fair chance to do something that brings results and what they're doing now isn't bringing them anything. If we were to have some support, something that would guarantee that we were gaining something, but for a country with all the power that we have, we're making men fight in a fashion that defies reason. What we need, Sir, are some troops to sweep through the areas and secure them after we leave; otherwise we're just going to be shot to hell after we go through, and there'll be nothing gained."

Yes, this is the same Kerry who today is calling for 40,000 more US troops to deployed to Iraq. CP

Coming next: How Kerry won his Silver Star.

(**NADER** *continued from page 1)*

neighboring Guadaloupe or Martinique.

Part of the explanation for this new occupation is habit. Intervening in Haiti's political affairs is certainly a longtime habit of the United States. Once it bothered to recognize Haiti diplomatically some 58 years after its revolution (until that point, a republic of former slaves understandably upset Southern plantation owners), it cheerfully sent gunboats on a regular basis—24 times in 50 years— to protect American lives and property on the island. Finally, in 1915, President Woodrow Wilson decided that Haiti could not be trusted to run its own government at all and promptly occupied the country for the next twenty years. These were glory times for the United States Marines, many of whom won multiple medals of honor for their slaughter of Haitian independence fighters. Even after the exit of U.S. Marines from the island, U.S. officers remained fully in charge of the country's finances and custom houses until 1941.

CHERCHEZ L'INFAME

The French similarly vented their frustration at having lost beautiful Saint Domingue (as Haiti was called by the French) to black Jacobins. In 1825, prodded by former plantation owners who wanted to invade Haiti and re-enslave its citizens, France sent 12 warships armed with 500 canons to Port au Prince with demands for a massive indemnity payment. An agreement signed by Haitian President Jean Pierre Boyer forced Haiti to agree to a bill for the loss of its island set at 150 million francs. This sum was equivalent to France's annual budget, and amounted to 10 years' total revenue for the Haitian government. By comparison, France had just sold the U.S. the entire Louisiana Territory—an area 74 times the surface area of Haiti— for 60 million francs. In addition to this monetary settlement, France decreed that French ships and commercial goods going through Haiti would enjoy a discount of 50 percent thereafter. Although France later lowered the principal on the indemnity payment to 90 million francs, it extorted far more money from Haiti in the end because Haiti had been forced to borrow from French banks at usurious rates of interest to cover its annual debt service. As a result, Haiti continued to pay France for its slave plantations until 1947.

Haiti is also target practice for the U.S. and for an increasingly autonomous sector

(**Haiti** *continued on page 6)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ashcroft in Indonesia

Bloodshed and Terror with US Connivance

By BEN TERRALL

In the first visit to Indonesia by a Bush cabinet official since George W.'s October "trip to al-Qaeda hell" (in the words of an unnamed White House official quoted by the New York Times) John Ashcroft flew to Bali in early February to attend a two-day regional conference on terrorism. Though his appearance was described as a show of support for President Megawati Sukarnoputri, like George W. before him Ashcroft was more successful at further alienating most Indonesians who heard what he had to say.

This time around hatred of Washington was stoked by a refusal to turn alleged Al-qaeda bigwig and Bali bombing planner Hambali over to Jakarta, though Bush had earlier assured Megawati that the prize captive, whom U.S. authorities apprehended in Thailand, would be made available to her government.

Ashcroft said he was "not able to give a time frame" for when the prisoner would be made available for questioning by Indonesian authorities. "We're working toward providing access consistent with fighting terror in a comprehensive way", Ashcroft said in a bureaucratic approximation of his commander-in-chief's mangled syntax, adding that the U.S. was still considering "competing impacts" of giving up the suspect. An Indonesian government spokesman responded that a reasonable timeframe would have been "several months ago" as "Time is of the essence to strengthen our cases against people we're bringing to trial". Visiting Indonesia on March 10, Tom Ridge blasted Jakarta for releasing an Islamic cleric accused of involvement in the Bali bombing but stonewalled on Hambail, saying, "this is a matter that still has to be determined at a later date".

Of course, as uncertain as his current whereabouts and condition is (the accused bomber is being held in one of those infamous "undisclosed locations"), Hambali would hardly be treated with kid gloves by Indonesian security forces.

As an Asia Times online commentator delicately put it in discussing Jakarta's contribution to the "war on terror," "insufficient attention is given to the due process of the law, a problem that Indonesia suffers in no small degree".

That "problem" has rarely been a hindrance to U.S. cooperation with Jakarta, which has only been blocked owing to unceasing agitation by the East Timor Action Network and other human rights organizers. At the beginning of 2004 the U.S. Congress renewed a ban on International Military Education and Training (IMET) aid for the Indonesian military, largely because of Indonesian military (TNI) involvement in the killing of a U.S. citizen [see Counterpunch, November 29 / 30, 2003, Don't Think Twice: Bush Does Bali], but activist pressure could not stop funding for the State Department's Diplomatic Security Service Task Force 88, an "antiterror" unit consisting of troops from Indonesia's Mobile Brigade (Brimob) police. More than $12 million was spent to build a training center south of Jakarta for twenty-four Indonesian police, who fired more than 30,000 bullets in a six week course taught by U.S. special forces veterans.

The two entities most responsible for reinvigorating military influence in Indonesian society since the fall of (Suharto) are Megawati and the U.S. government."

Time Asia's Jason Tedjasukmana wrote, "By the end of 2005, another $12 million will have gone toward forging a team of 400 Indonesian investigators, explosives experts and snipers, armed with high-end American weaponry, including assault vehicles, Colt M-4 assault rifles, Armalite AR-10 sniper rifles and Remington 870 shotguns."

In another police training program, the U.S. government is working with the International Labor Organization, supposedly to encourage less repressive labor relations. But Indonesian Minister of Manpower Jacob Nuwa Wea raised doubts about the wisdom of spending $40 million on teaching Indonesian police "democratic values" when he explained, "if they (workers) are out of order, it's o.k. for the police to slap them around a little bit. We often slap our children at home if they are naughty, don't we?"

In addition to savage campaigns against civilians in Aceh and Papua, Brimob has recently been implicated in violently displacing villagers in South Sulawesi. The Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions reports, "between August-October 2003, more than 15,000 people have been forcibly evicted in Jakarta and other cities by the City Council Commissions. In the community of Jembatan Besi, dozens of police, accompanied by bulldozers, violently evicted hundreds of people from their homes, demolishing some structures when people were still inside."

Such atrocities are of little concern to U.S. elites busily recommending "Washington consensus" economic policies for Indonesia. That work is the bread and butter of the National Commission on U.S.-Indonesia Relations, made up of "prominent Americans" including Bechtel Board Member George Shultz, former commander of the Pacific Fleet Dennis Blair and veteran Democratic Party hawk Lee Hamilton. The commission issued a fifty-eight page report in 2003 on "Strengthening U.S. Relations with Indonesia" that soft-pedals continued TNI repression with the phrase "problems remain in several areas, and reform will take a long time"; it also recycles the convenient passive-voice statement "Indonesia is handicapped by the legacy of more than 40 years of authoritarian rule", without a hint of the key role the U.S. government and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

<U.S.-based> corporations played in propping up the Suharto regime for more than three decades. The report stresses that Indonesia, "occupying some of the world's most strategic real estate", is important because "it has huge natural resources and a strategic location astride major sea lines of communication... including the oil and mineral sectors, Indonesia is home to an estimated $25 billion in U.S. investment, with more than 300 major U.S. firms represented in the country." Not surprisingly, it concludes, "A free trade agreement would go a long way to demonstrate our special relationship with Indonesia."

U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia Ralph Boyce recently said, "There is no better friend of Indonesia today than the U.S. I think Indonesia's transition to democracy is one of the quiet success stories of the new millennium". But in the current run up to presidential and parliamentary elections, that "transition" is dominated by Indonesian military veterans, including General Wiranto, a presidential candidate who UN prosecutors have indicted for crimes against humanity in East Timor.

As usual, Washington's "friendship" is largely skewed toward military elements with a questionable commitment to democracy. Indonesia specialist Jeffrey Winters puts it this way: "The two entities most responsible for reinvigorating military influence in Indonesian society since the fall of (Suharto) are Megawati and the U.S. government."

While in Bali, Ashcroft praised plans for April parliamentary elections and a July presidential election. "These elections solidify Indonesia's status as one of the world's leading democracies", he said. "In this both ethnically and religiously diverse country, you could not have done this without your long-held tradition of tolerance which sets an example for the world to follow."

That "tradition of tolerance" is far from obvious in Aceh, where human rights investigator Aguswandi argues "the conflict... is basically the problem of the politics in Indonesia: an inability of Indonesia to transform itself into a more democratic, less militaristic state." Crackdowns on dissent in that war-torn region have included use of anti-terrorist legislation passed in 2003 to send negotiators from Aceh peace talks to jail on trumped-up charges. A young Acehnese man was also recently sentenced to three years for organizing a rally where protestors carried banners reading "A Peaceful Indonesia means freedom for Aceh" and "Aceh is a killing fields."

On August 5, 2003, Indonesia's ad-hoc court on war crimes in East Timor (which Human Rights Watch called a "sham") found General Adam Damiri guilty of crimes against humanity in East Timor. Despite this conviction, Damiri was promoted to Assistant for Operations to the Chief of the General Staff, where he has overseen military operations in Aceh similar to the ones he directed in East Timor in 1999.

At the other end of the archipelago, on December 1, 2003, the Indonesian government announced that Timbul Silaen would be the new chief of police in Papua. Previously police chief in East Timor during the terrible violence of 1998 and 1999, Silaen has been indicted for war crimes by a UN-led team of prosecutors in East Timor but was acquitted of similar charges by Jakarta's ad hoc court. The notorious militia leader Eurico Guterres, who conducted murderous attacks on East Timorese civilians in 1999, is also launching operations in Papua.

Hendardi, who heads Indonesia's Human Rights and Legal Aid Association, said "This is to show the public that the military did nothing wrong in East Timor. It means they do not care about justice. The perpetrators (of the violence) are being rewarded."

Ashcroft stressed that the U.S. "recognizes that many governments in this region have limited resources to fight the scourge of terrorism. We're looking for ways to further our cooperation in the region, cooperation against terror networks."

Ashcroft was unfortunately not referring to the infamous Kopassus special forces, of which Australian Professor Damien Kingsbury noted, "The history of Kopsassus'...activities reads more like that of a terrorist organization, which is not surprising given that the techniques and tactics of terror are explicitly outlined in a confidential Kopassus training manual."

A 2002 study for the US Naval Postgraduate School observed that the Indonesian army had become "a major facilitator of terrorism" via "the radical Muslim militias they had organized, trained, and financed." The study pointed out that the army financed one of these groups, Laskar Jihad, "with money embezzled from its defense budget, estimated to be about $9.3 million." Laskar Jihad has killed thousands of civilians in Maluku.

Ed McWilliams, Political Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta from 1996 to 1999, describes Pembela Islam ("Defense of Islam") as another Islamic terror group with ties to the military, and says this outfit "basically has conducted retaliatory actions for racketeers, including military operatives". McWilliams told Counterpunch that "I saw members of Pembela Islam directly involved in the Fall 1998 anti-Ambonese riots that struck Jakarta. In one incident, the remains of an Ambonese who had been hacked to death after found hiding in an ally was brought before a crowd that the PI was addressing. PI spokesmen led the crowd in cheers."

But, as in the U.S., the more practical reasons for a war on terror do not include reigning in an out of control military. In the words of the veteran Indonesian organizer Munir, Megawati is using security "to win public support, which is in doubt because of her failure to deal with economic problems, unemployment and corruption. CP

Ben Terrall is a frequent contributor to CounterPunch. He lives in Oakland, California.

SUBSCRIPTION INFO

Enter/Renew Subscription here:

One year $40 Two yrs $70
($35 email only / $45 email/print)
One year institution/supporters $100
One year student/low income, $30
T-shirts, $17
Please send back issue(s)
_____ ($5/issue)

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

_____

Payment must accompany order, or dial 1-800-840-3683 and renew by credit card. Add $12.50 for Canadian and $17.50 for foreign subscriptions. If you want Counter-Punch emailed to you please supply your email address. Make checks payable to: **CounterPunch**
Business Office
PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA 95558

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(**Haiti** *continued from page 3*)

of international contractors and multilateral bank bureaucrats who are always eager for new work in "democracy-building". For wildly partisan officials in the U.S. State Department now running U.S. policy in the Caribbean and Latin America, President Aristide was an affront.

Despite real missteps in his fractured tenures as president, he was the only major political figure in the last twenty years in Haiti with a popular following, and the Lavalas party the only party with a mass national base. Undoubtedly, his original calls as a slum priest for comprehensive social reform and house-cleaning of government smacked of the potential for chumminess with next-door Cuba.

In addition, his antipathy in the 1980s toward U.S. intervention, which at that time took the form of a cadre of C.I.A.-backed thugs which also ran drugs into Florida, surely contributed to his ouster by the Haitian military in 1991. The officials overseeing Haiti policy are Reagan-era veterans of subterfuge and subversion in Central America, including Otto Reich, John Negroponte, Elliot Abrams, and (before his ignominious departure last summer) John Poindexter.

The most visible in recent weeks on Haiti was Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger Noriega, a man who has had Aristide in his gunsights for over a decade. As junior confidant to Senator Jesse Helms and Dan Burton, he was party to a three-year campaign to defame Aristide and prevent his return to power. All the while CIA-backed thugs left carnage in the streets daily in Port Au Prince. In his capacity in the State Department since 2003, and for two years before that as the U.S. Permanent Representative to the OAS, Roger Noriega aggressively advertised his intention to oust Aristide a second time.

But France? Why should it cooperate with this cohort of extremist, neocon villains? Has the coterie of Left Bank intellectuals who helped bring down the 4th Republic not sufficiently established its influence on foreign policy matters of this sort? Never mind the Maghreb or Francophone Africa or nuclear testing—those things actually matter, but Haiti? The removal of Aristide at the hands of these right-wing Americans seems perfect for a show of self-righteous Continental indignation.

Enter Regis Debray, Le Running Dog Onctueux

The answer may lie with the findings of a body of scholars put together by President Aristide's government. This spring, the Haiti Restitution Commission, working largely from the research of Dr. Francis St. Hubert, was set to release a full report to back a formal legal demand that France return the money it extorted as reparations from Haiti , beginning in 1825. The Commission calculated that in today's terms, the amount of 90 million francs, capitalizing at a modest 5 annual percent interest, would today equal 21.7 billion U.S. dollars.

The potential viability of the campaign apparently spooked officials in Paris. Ira Kurzban, a Miami attorney who represented the Aristide government clarifies the issues: "This is not a claim for reparations for slavery. It's a claim specifically directed toward the money Haiti was required to pay as a result of the decree by the French king in 1825, from an economy the French knew couldn't afford it, through the use of force. This is impermissible under international law."

Accordingly, as the bicentennial of Haiti's independence approached, the French were dismissive of the claims and played up the objections to the campaign by a small number of anti-Aristide activists. Still nervous about the charges, however, the government dispatched a now groomed and house-trained Regis Debray to examine Haitian-French relations as part of a "Committee on Reflection of Haiti," which would report on ways the France could encourage Haiti's political and economic development.

Ominously, when French President Jacques Chirac was asked about Haiti's restitution demands, he indignantly claimed that France already was providing Haiti with millions in in aid.

Stressing that he had great sympathy for the Haitian people, he nonetheless warned that "before bringing up claims of this nature, I cannot stress enough to the authorities of Haiti the need to be very vigilant about— how should I put it— the nature of their actions and their regime." CP

Heather Williams teaches in the politics department at Pomona College. See her earlier pieces on the Haitian coup on our website, www. counterpunch.org.

CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558
Wear a CP Shirt!
To Order Call: 1-800-840-3683

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED